

FORUM

University of Edinburgh
Postgraduate Journal of Culture and the Arts
Issue 08 | Spring 2009

Title	The War Artists' Advisory Committee, Aviation and the Nation during the Second World War
Author	Rebecca Searle
Publication	FORUM: University of Edinburgh Postgraduate Journal of Culture and the Arts
Issue Number	08
Issue Date	Spring 2009
Publication Date	05/06/2009
Editors	Jana Funke & Lena Wånggren

FORUM claims non-exclusive rights to reproduce this article electronically (in full or in part) and to publish this work in any such media current or later developed. The author retains all rights, including the right to be identified as the author wherever and whenever this article is published, and the right to use all or part of the article and abstracts, with or without revision or modification in compilations or other publications. Any latter publication shall recognise FORUM as the original publisher.

The War Artists' Advisory Committee, Aviation and the Nation during the Second World War

Rebecca Searle (University of Sussex)

This article draws upon broader research that examines the representation of aviation in the collection of the War Artists' Advisory Committee (WAAC).¹ On the 23rd November 1939, the WAAC met for the first time. They were charged with creating an artistic record of the war both at home and abroad on behalf of the state. By the time the committee was dissolved in December 1945, it had amassed nearly 6,000 works by over 400 artists, depicting all major aspects of the war. Although library shelves are filled with histories of various aspects of the Second World War, this collection has hardly been touched by academic historians.²

Commenting on the neglect of the collection, Brian Foss, who has produced some excellent recent work on the subject, speculates that with the critical focus on the development of modernism “[t]he war years tended to be relegated to the status of a hiatus between the controversy-filled art scene of the 1930s and the renewal of contacts between British and international art after 1945” (British Artists and the Second World War 412). Only those in the collection whose work seems most modern (Henry Moore, Paul Nash, Graham Sutherland, John Piper and Stanley Spencer) have attracted study. Foss believes the focus on these individuals “has worked to occlude the complexity and significance of the WAAC’s activities” (*War Paint* 3). By highlighting here a wider range of artists, I hope to demonstrate the depth and richness of this collection. Although the focus of this article is the Second World War, considerable discussion is devoted to the preceding period. Too frequently histories of the war tend to lift this period out of its historical context and study it in isolation. As such, the ways in which existing notions of the nation were harnessed and modified to create an image of Britain at war are easily overlooked. A central concern of this article is the way that representations of aviation were transformed to accord with constructions of Britain at war.

This article first examines interwar anxieties about the air raid and the particular challenge that flight posed to ideas of the nation, before considering how these anxieties find expression in the WAAC collection. The second section focuses

on British enthusiasm for aviation and highlights the ways in which aviation was used to reinforce ideas of the nation. The concluding part discusses how this contradictory relationship between ideas of nation and aviation was represented.

During the 1930s, the consequences of aerial warfare dominated discussion of aviation. In the House of Commons in July 1934, announcing the first stage of British rearmament, Stanley Baldwin pronounced that in the Air Age “the old frontiers are gone. When you think of the defence of England, you no longer think of the chalk cliffs of Dover. You think of the Rhine. That is where our frontier lies” (qtd. in “Parliament” 8). Baldwin’s evocation of collapsing frontiers was echoed in other British writing of the thirties. Whilst, as Ian Patterson points out, the prominence of this motif reflected a host of changing social, economic, cultural and political conditions, it had especial pertinence in relation to aviation (135). The invention of flight collapsed the frontier between home and fighting fronts. Moreover, it was believed that it was virtually impossible to defend the national territory from an aerial attack. Baldwin’s doom-laden prophesy “the bomber will always get through” was so frequently alluded to in the 1930s that Patterson describes it as “a mantra” of the decade (76).

Terrifying predictions of a future air war were particularly prolific in Britain because of the importance of territorial integrity to ideas of the nation. Britain was imagined as the “island fortress”.³ In the 1938 Penguin Special, *The Air Defence of Britain*, Air-Commodore Charlton noted that thanks to the nation’s geography, Britain had been spared the “unending conflict” from which the Continent “seldom had a respite” (17). However, this had become meaningless in the Air Age: “[a]t one fell swoop the barriers are lowered, the walls are breached, the rivers crossed and the mountains overtopped” (13-14). Aviation therefore fundamentally challenged the way the national space was understood. The new permeability of national borders infused British discussions of aviation. Baldwin, for example, evoked the end of immunity with the image of the cliffs of Dover. These traditional coastal sentinels, along with ideas of the nation rooted in such notions, became moribund in the age of air power.

This found expression in British literature of the period. *Between the Acts* (1941) revolved around the performance of a pageant-play described as “Our Island History”. In the prologue of the pageant, England was represented by a young girl who tells the audience:

Drawn from our island history.

England am I...

Sprung from the sea

Whose billows blown by mighty storm

Cut off from France and Germany

This isle...

Now weak and small

A child, as all may see... (48-49)

In the Air Age, England was exposed as “weak and small”, vulnerable as a child at the end of its island history. By the time the novel was published this idea had become a national cliché. Its origins are generally attributed to Lord Northcliffe, proprietor of the *Daily Mail*. The first European flight of a heavier-than-air machine on 12 November 1906 by Santos-Dumont was consigned to a four-line paragraph in the News-in-brief section of the *Daily Mail*. Northcliffe was highly critical of this editorial decision “Don’t you realize that England is no longer an island?” he commented. “Let me tell you, there will be no more sleeping behind the wooden walls of old England with the Channel as our safety moat. This means aerial chariots of a foe will descend on British soil if war comes!” (qtd. in Hyde 8). By 1908, such sentiments had found their way into literature. In *The War of the Air*, H. G. Wells’ Bert Smallways contemplated “that the little island in the silver sea was at the end of its immunity” (243-4). Advancing technological development, accelerated by the First World War, meant that it was less than a decade before Britain’s interior was attacked from the air, first by Zeppelins and later in 1917 by Gotha bombers. Although the casualties and damage inflicted by these raids was relatively minor, they were invested with great significance. Whilst Britain was not to experience another aerial attack until the Second World War, interwar popular culture was saturated with horrifying images of the air raid. The dissemination of these images of technological destruction was enabled by another technological wonder of the age. Cinema audiences witnessed the advancing capabilities of bomber technology in newsreel coverage of the Sino-Japanese and Spanish Civil Wars. Doom-laden prophecies of

future wars multiplied as tensions in Europe increased. In this context the 1917 raids were revisited and invested with heightened significance. In 1938 Charlton asserted that these raids “should rank with us, and will in the eyes of posterity, as the marking of an epoch” (9).

Charlton reverses the traditional assumptions of the island fortress. In the Air Age Britain is portrayed as uniquely vulnerable to attack. He opens his essay by taking the reader back to the 1066 invasion of Britain. Charlton attributes this defeat to the instruction given to the archers to pitch the arrows at a steep angle and “rain them down as missiles from the sky” (9). Immediately he takes the reader forward to the Gotha raids of 1917. This establishes a narrative of Britain’s particular vulnerability from the air, a theme he later elaborates on. Charlton describes London as Britain’s “loadstone” (28-38). Close to the coast and easily located by the course of the Thames, Greater London contained a third of the nation’s population and a large proportion of new and vital industries. Moreover, much of the food and other vital supplies arrived in London to be distributed across the country, whilst the infrastructure for heat, lighting and water supply was also concentrated in the capital:

If it had been done deliberately, we could not as a nation have produced a social pattern, and a set economy, more favorable for aggression from the air. Our millions are bottle-fed, and all their needs are cared for, by a system of distribution and supply so intricate, and so haphazardly evolved, that once seriously dislocated beyond the power of immediate repair they would be as helpless as new-born babes to fend for themselves. Others, to a certain extent, are in the same boat, but the one in which we find ourselves is inconveniently narrow, is densely overcrowded and has no provision lockers for the voyage. We are laid out, as if on an operating-table, for the surgical methods of the bomber. (102)

The analogy of the nation with a body emphasises the incursion of war into the private. In the Air Age the island nation now found itself particularly vulnerable and Britain’s domestic interior – a space central to notions of national identity in this period – was laid open for attack.

In her illuminating study *Forever England*, Alison Light highlights a redefinition of Englishness in the aftermath of the First World War:

...a move away from formerly heroic and official masculine public rhetorics of national destiny and a dynamic and missionary view of the Victorian and Edwardian middle classes in 'Great Britain' to an Englishness at once more inward-looking, more domestic and more private. (8)

Home became a new locus for national identity at the same moment that aviation rendered it vulnerable to direct attack. This was emphasised in interwar representations of the air raid. The most infamous fictional representation of an air raid from this period remains the 1936 film *Things to Come*, which prominently juxtaposed the domestic with war. The opening titles inform the viewer that it is Christmas 1940 in Everytown, a thinly veiled fictional representation of London. Whilst people rush about the city in festive mood, ominous headlines in the background pronounce "The world is on the brink of war". We learn of the outbreak of war during a family Christmas celebration in the suburbs and see the searchlights grope in the sky for the expected invader. The outbreak of war is rapidly followed by a devastating air strike. On the streets previously populated by Christmas shoppers, panic ensues as people rush for shelter and gas masks. Next, a frantic montage of explosions and flying rubble. Modern leisure spaces such as the cinema and the department store collapse as the bombs fall. Whilst we do not see the planes themselves, the film lingers over the destruction they leave in their wake. Everytown is in ruins. Dead bodies lie intertwined in the rubble. This sequence climaxes with a shot of a child buried in the rubble.

The impact of this film derived from its similarity to journalistic representations of the air raid. The air raid was frequently juxtaposed against quintessentially peaceful leisure and domestic occasions. The *Daily Mirror's* coverage of the bombing of Margate and Southend on August 12th 1917 stressed that the bombs had fallen unannounced on "civilian holiday makers" enjoying a Sunday in an English "pleasure-resort" ("*War on Babies: New Victims of Hun Hatred*"). The Pathé newsreel *Bombing Madrid* (1937), filmed a year later than *Things to Come*, employed a remarkably similar opening structure to the fictional film. People mill about the city centre. Leisurely, soothing music accompanies this footage. This is interrupted by the harrowing wail of the air raid siren. The pace of the pedestrians alters suddenly as they flee for shelter. We don't see the raid itself but the newsreel

dwells on horrific images of the destruction. The same contrast between the domestic and bombing was made in other newsreel footage of the aftermath of raids. The British Movietone newsreel *Barcelona Bombed* (1938) depicted buildings sliced open by bombs to reveal domestic interiors. These domestic spaces are exposed, no longer enclosed and protected, like the interior of the nation in the air age. This serves to reinforce the aeroplane's ability to transverse once stable frontiers and inflict destruction on the civilian population.

Women and children, signifiers of the domestic, were envisaged as the primary victims of air attack to underline the new vulnerability of home. When Baldwin warned the nation in 1932 that "the bomber will always get through" he emphasised that it would be women and children who would be killed. As in *Things to Come*, frantic montages of destruction frequently climaxed on graphic shots of injured or dead children. In the particularly graphic *Bombing Madrid* the din of the air raid is replaced by silence for a minute long montage of dead bodies, mostly the corpses of children. Women rush through the street grasping baby-sized bundles to their chests. Similar imagery is harnessed in artistic representations of the air raid, such as Picasso's representation of *Guernica* (1937). On the right of the picture a woman screams in agony whilst on the left a woman raises her head in grief, clutching a dead child. The monotone palette employed is reminiscent of the way the world witnessed images of the air raid through black and white films and newsprint. Patterson notes the degree to which this discourse of the air raid was self-referential: "Books quote freely from each other, creating and mutually reinforcing a growing sense of apocalyptic inevitability" (112). This is also true visually. Certain stock images are repeatedly deployed in newsreels, feature films and political propaganda in the 1930s: catastrophic destruction of urban centres, the bomber flying over the domestic space unchallenged, panic-stricken citizens and graphic images of the victims' corpses. However, such gruesome images were not compatible with governmental projections of the British at war. The artists of the WAAC therefore had to find more oblique ways to express the anxiety surrounding aviation.

The WAAC was part of the Ministry of Information (MoI). The relationship was frequently turbulent. The MoI questioned the propaganda value of the committee and resented funding it. The committee itself was keen to distance themselves from more overt forms of propaganda and resisted attempts at censorship.⁴ Nevertheless, the

collection as a whole broadly accords with other state representations of Britain at war. As such, images of fear, panic and death that defined representations of the air raid in the 1930s were problematic, given that the idea that the British stoically endured aerial bombardment was propagated. Whilst there are a few images in the collection that feature injured or dead people, such as Louis Duffy's *Aftermath* (1940), the bodies are partially obscured and intact. The mutilation of the human form had to be expressed obliquely, as Brian Foss argues, "architectural damage acts as a visual surrogate for the unseen broken bodies of the former inhabitants, evoking rather than portraying the violation of the body" (*War Paint* 41). Several artists were asked to remove signs of panic from their illustrations. Frances Macdonald was asked to alter the expressions on the faces of the people in her depiction of an air raid shelter, whilst the committee considered Carel Weight's painting, *It Happened to Us*, which showed civilians fleeing an attack, "unacceptable" (Harries 186).

On the whole the WAAC's representations of air raids accorded closely with more overtly propagandist portrayals, such as the MoI's *Britain Can Take It* (1940). Edward Ardizzone's shelter scenes embodied the idea of the stoic nation enduring the raids. Feliks Topolski's *The Warehouse Shelter* (1940) is more jovial and depicted the notion of camaraderie fostered under fire. To understand the way in which the ideas associated with representations of the air raid in the 1930s were harnessed and modified in wartime, we must examine a more complex response. In Henry Moore's tube shelter drawings, as in representations of the air raid from the 1930s, women and children featured strongly. Whilst they are not dead, grieving or fleeing in panic, there was continuity in their deployment. Women and children remained signifiers of the domestic and embodied the incursion of war into home. As such, these images expressed the dislocation of war. Home, the locus for ideas of the nation in the interwar period, has retreated into a dank, squalid, subterranean world. Moore notes that he observed that in the underground shelters "[p]eople who were obviously strangers to one another forming tight little intimate groups" (Moore and Carey 9). In *Grey Tube Shelter* (1940) the individuals are posed as in a family portrait, hinting at the conception of the national community as a family, a trope frequently alluded to in wartime propaganda. In Moore's image, the people lack defining features, their individual identities are subsumed beneath the identity of the group. The figures are draped over each other, limbs entwine, boundaries between one body and the next blur. The nation here appears literally fused together. Moore therefore simultaneously

portrayed the disruption to the domestic caused by bombing whilst reconstituting the family as the nation and expressing the idea of national unity fostered in adversity.

Moore also hinted at the fear aroused by the air raid. In the 1941 exhibition catalogue, the shelters in *Tube Shelter Perspective* (1941) were described as “regimented, as only fear can regiment, helpless yet tense” (qtd. in *"Tate Collection: Tube Shelter Perspective by Henry Moore"*). This expression of fear during the raid was unusual, not just in the WAAC collection, but in official representations of air raids in general. Nevertheless, the fear is not like the panic seen in images of the raid in the 1930s. Moore’s fear is brooding, quiet, restrained and unspoken, suggesting the problematic nature of the open expression of fear within ideas of the British at war.

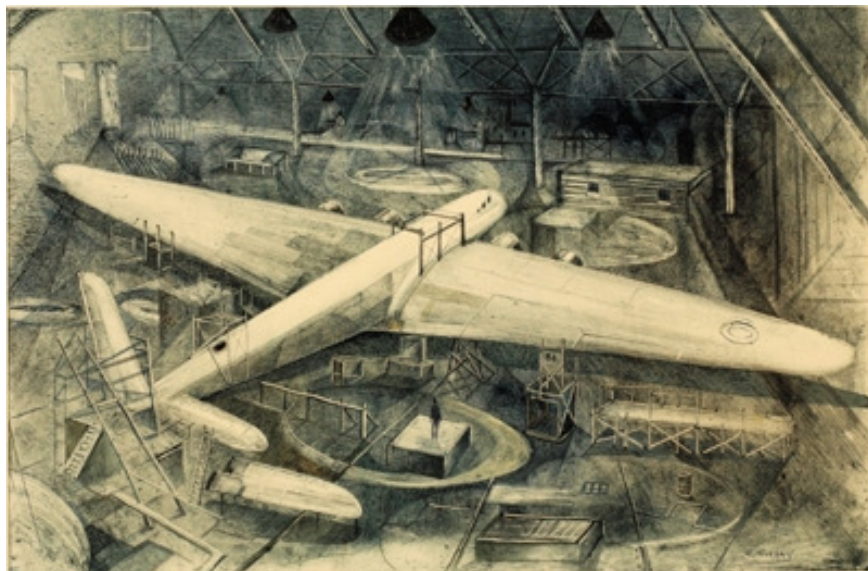


Fig. 1. Charles Murray, *Building a Bomber Aircraft* (1941) Imperial War Museum

Charles Murray evoked the fear associated with aviation, but not through a direct representation of an air raid. *Building a Bomber Aircraft* appeared in the production issue of the second series of *War Pictures by British Artists* (1943).⁵ In the accompanying blurb, Murray’s image was described as an “imaginative treatment” in contrast to the “realistic style” of Harold Bubb’s *Production of Vickers Armstrong Wellington Mark 1A Bomber* (1941) that featured on the facing page (*Production* 61). Murray’s representation accorded with what the WAAC’s chairman, Kenneth Clarke, thought the purpose of artistic record was:

What did it look like? they will ask in 1981, and no amount of description or documentation will answer them. Nor will big, formal compositions like the battle pictures which hang in palaces; and even photographs, which tell us so much, will leave out the colour and peculiar feeling of events in these extraordinary years. Only the artist with his heightened powers of perception can recognise which elements in a scene can be pickled for posterity in the magical essence of style. (*War Pictures by British Artists*)

This, argues Stuart Sillars, is an essentially Romantic understanding of art, which he identifies as a dominant style of this period (55). Essentially, Romanticism was concerned with the relationship between inner and external worlds. Artists used external forms to communicate the ideas, feelings and responses of experience. In this image Murray drew on the sublime, a device associated with the earlier phase of Romanticism. Terror lies at the centre of understandings of the sublime. For Edward Burke "...whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime..." (137). Just as the human figure was inserted into the landscape to indicate the sublimity of nature, here Murray juxtaposed the small and vulnerable human figure against the immensity of the bomber. Through this relationship, the fragility of the human body in modern warfare is emphasised. Whilst the human form appears weak and powerless quite conversant qualities are attributed to the aeroplane. As such, Murray also expressed alternative understandings of the relationship between aviation and the nation.

The British attitude towards aviation cannot be characterised solely by anxiety. As David Edgerton has demonstrated, there was a tremendous enthusiasm for aviation at every level in British society. During the 1930s it was difficult not to encounter celebratory images of aviation in everyday life. Whether looking at literature, film, print media, advertising or the disposable items of ephemeral culture, the aesthetic of the aeroplane was commonplace. The British were enthralled by the achievement of flight, romanced the speed and glamour of aviation and worshipped pilots as national heroes and heroines. As Peter Fritzsche stresses, aviation was viewed in nationalistic terms:

...progress was widely perceived as a scramble among states in which there were unmistakable winners and losers. The various aeronautical world records... provided an exact tally of national performance. If machines were the measure of men in the modern era... airplanes and airships were the measure of nations at the beginning of the twentieth century, distinguishing not only European genius from African or Asian mean, but also the truly great powers among the European nation-states. (3)

As has been documented, the aeroplane was harnessed by Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin as a symbol of the modern nation.⁶ The same is true in Britain. However, as Bernhard Rieger shows, the relationship between nationalism and technology was determined by the essentially conservative understanding of British modernity that emphasised continuity and preservation. Aviation was therefore assimilated into existing ideas of the nation, particularly those that were challenged by the new circumstances of the age.

In the interwar period aviation, both civil and military, was closely associated with Empire and Britain's position as a world power. Aviation was integrated into a tradition of technological imperialism and viewed as central to the maintenance of Empire.⁷ The victor's rewards at the end of the First World War meant the British Empire was at its largest. However, due to the costs of war and the economic difficulties experienced in this period, Britain was in a poor position to finance the maintenance of the enlarged Empire. Military air power proved an inexpensive way of suppressing the wave of uprisings and nationalist movements that spread across Britain's territories in this period.⁸ Empire and civil aviation were also closely associated. Modern understandings of Britain and the Empire stressed a trading and economic relationship, demonstrated by the establishment of The Empire Marketing Board. The aeroplane was central to this version of Empire. It made communication and the transport of persons, goods and mail rapid, strengthening the ties between empire and home, both physically and in the imagination.

This intimate association between Empire and aviation is reflected in the way that aviation was organised, discussed and represented. Imperial Airways was the nation's airline and it predominantly flew to destinations in the Empire. This in turn shaped the development of British civil aeroplanes. Seaplanes and biplanes that were suitable for the landing conditions of Empire continued to be developed in Britain as

other nations embraced all metal stressed skin monoplanes. British record breakers raced each other to Australia and Cape Town. Popular culture was flooded with items that reinforced the links between aviation and Empire. In juvenile literature, imperialist adventures evolved into modern flying stories whilst cigarette cards celebrated the Empire Air Routes, depicting aerial views of the Empire.⁹

Aviation was used to reinforce the image of Britain as a technological and industrial world leader. Edgerton understands aircraft as:

...an encapsulation of the technological prowess of a nation and an index of commitment to modernity. Aircraft became symbols of a nation's manufacturing prestige, the spearhead of its industrial might, a kind of flying advertisement for washing machines and motor-cars. (101)

The demonstration of such potency gained particular pertinence during the interwar years. A core plank of British national identity was its leadership in the industrial revolution. This leadership was challenged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by emerging industrial nations. As depression blighted some of the former strongholds of British industry in the interwar years, it appeared that Britain's industrial power was on the wane. Empire Marketing Board films, such as *Industrial Britain* (1931) and *Aero-Engine* (1934) held up the aircraft industry as an example of continuing British industrial dynamism. Such propaganda gained an increased pertinence as international relations worsened. In films such as Alexander Korda's *The Conquest of the Air* (1940, shot in 1937) the history of the development of aviation was presented in nationalistic terms as nations scrambled to prepare industrial capacity for a war that would be won or lost in the factories.

The assimilation of the aircraft and ideas of the nation evident in the 1930s reached its apogee during the Second World War. Air power was presented as fundamental to the successful prosecution of war and the survival of the nation itself. A report of psychiatrists, submitted to the Ministry of Health in 1938, warned that in the event of an air raid there would be three times as many psychological casualties as physical casualties (McLaine 26). Psychological injuries such as these were believed to pose a great threat to civilian morale. Due to the nature of a total war, Britain's war machine was reliant on its civilian population. As Ian McLaine argues, government feared that "[d]efeate might flow not from the collapse of armies on a conventional

battlefield but from the breakdown of morale at home” (2). There was therefore a determined propagandist effort in the first year of the war to reverse Baldwin’s mantra that “the bomber will always get through”. Films such as *The Lion has Wings* (1940) showcased Britain’s aerial defences and attempted to demonstrate the continuing validity of the impregnability of the “island nation”. Whilst this was in part propagandist, technological developments in fighter plane technology, radar and communication systems meant that from a military perspective defence against an aerial invasion appeared more viable. This belief was enshrined in the Inskip report of 1937 that gave priority to an initially defensive air strategy.



Fig. 2. Paul Nash, *Battle of Britain* (1941) Imperial War Museum.

A great number of WAAC images detail the defence of Britain against aerial attack. There were a plethora of images of balloon barrages, Air Raid Precautions’ control rooms, Anti-Aircraft posts and fighter planes. Paul Nash brought together these elements in *The Battle of Britain* (1941). Britain is depicted here as the island nation. Whilst blue skies remain over Britain, separated by the channel, the continent is enveloped in dark clouds. Barrage balloons guard its cities, whilst fighter planes rise from the landscape to meet the enemy in the air. Remaining on the ground are scores of aircraft, indicating Britain’s superiority in the air. The combination of these defences wards off invasion and allow the myth of the island nation to remain intact.

Offensive air power was also central to the nation at war. Particularly after the fall of France, the bomber was presented as the only means to take the war into the

enemy heartland. Humphrey Jennings' *Heart of Britain* (1941) depicted a move towards a more offensive stage of war. The film climaxed with an image of a Whitley bomber taking off at dusk, whilst a choir sing the Hallelujah chorus of Handel's *Messiah*. The message is unequivocal: Britain can and will hit back. Concurrent with the release of the film, Churchill ordered that there be a drastic increase in the production of medium and heavy bombers to strike back at Germany. The bomber programme was sanctioned in December 1941 and required a further build up of the aircraft industry.

Representing the might of the aircraft industry gained a greater pertinence in war. In common with other official representations, WAAC images of the aircraft industry sought to present a modern and highly efficient industry. For example, a series by John Ensor depicted the construction of a Wellington bomber in just 44 hours. Whilst the series as a whole pays homage to the highly efficient and organised production process, individual images emphasised the scale of the industry. *Rhythms of Mass Production* (1942) depicted rows of wings lined up ready for construction in the store. Similarly Murray's *Noses in the Assembling Room of an Aircraft Factory* portrayed two seemingly unending lines of parts. These images emphasised the volume of production and a highly resourced industry. Leslie Cole's *Glider Construction –Fitting Undercarriages* (1942) suggests a technologically advanced industry. He originally wanted to describe the workers as 'technicians' in the painting's title, to further emphasise the technological sophistication of the development of the prototype glider (IWM.GP55/155). Nevertheless, this is suggested by the futuristic form of the plane and the vast empty factory space painted in metallic tones. Similar techniques were used in Raymond McGrath's *Assembling the Wing of a Blenheim Bomber* (1940).

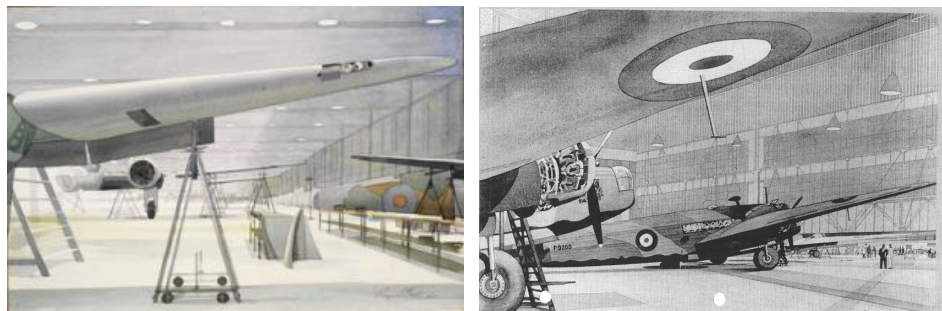


Fig. 3. Raymond McGrath, *Assembling the Wing of a Blenheim Bomber* (1940). Imperial War Museum.

Raymond McGrath, *Wellington Bomber Nearing Completion* (1940). Lost by enemy action.

In *Wellington Bomber Nearing Completion* (1940), McGrath emphasised the magnitude of the industry through the juxtaposition of the tiny human form against the vastness of both the factory space and the Wellington.

Like McGrath, in *Building a Bomber Aircraft* (figure 1), Murray used the contrast between the human form and the aircraft in construction to convey the immensity of the industrial effort, however the meanings evoked are quite different. Whilst the figures that inhabit McGrath's painting are clearly workers and therefore integrated into the production process, Murray's lone figure stands elevated on a platform observing, separate and distinct from the industrial scene. The image thereby encourages a more complex reading.

David Nye notes that in attributing sublimity to human creations as opposed to nature different understandings emerge:

Because the overwhelming power displayed was human rather than natural, the "dialogue" was now not between man and nature but between man and the man-made. The awe induced by seeing an immense or dynamic technological or dynamic technological object became a celebration of the power of human reason, and this awe granted special privilege to engineers and inventors. The sense of weakness and humiliation before the superior power of nature was thus redirected, because the power displayed was not that of God or nature but that of particular human beings. (64)

The dialogue is therefore between the ordinary man and the superior understanding of the individuals intimately associated with the construction of the technological wonder. However, these understandings are again altered by the wartime context in which Murray's image was produced.

At the peak of mobilisation, in 1943, aircraft production accounted for the greatest share of British productive capacity and was the largest employer in the war economy. In an effort to combat falling productivity, exhibitions and talks in factories encouraged workers to identify the process they performed with the production of the aeroplane and the war effort itself. Moreover, particularly whilst Beaverbrook was the Minister for Aircraft Production, the production of aircraft was represented as a

national collective effort. All citizens were exhorted to identify with the production of aircraft, through initiatives such as the aluminium drive and the spitfire funds. Murray's image can therefore be understood as a dialogue between the individual and the nation. Whilst paying tribute to the might of Britain's industrial war machine, the vulnerability and fragility of the individual human body is also acknowledged. In this way Murray expressed the complex and often contradictory understanding of aviation in the national imagination. Moreover, this image reinforced one of the key ideas projected during the war. Whilst the individual is weak and powerless, the aircraft, as a symbol of the nation, emphasised that the strength and power of the nation derived from the collective effort.

Notes

¹ This research is funded by the AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award scheme and I work in conjunction with the Imperial War Museum and the University of Sussex.

² There are several exceptions, most notably those by Brian Foss. Good overviews of the committee have been written by Merion and Susie Harries, and Alan Ross. The collection is rarely mentioned in more general histories of the Second World War and when it is, such as by Angus Calder, the images tend to be used for illustrative purposes only and are not subject to the levels of analysis afforded to other source material.

³ For the heritage of the island nation see Gillian Beer.

⁴ For more on the relationship between MOI and the WAAC see Foss, "Message and Medium".

⁵ These two series of booklets were published by Oxford University Press on behalf of the WAAC. Priced at 1/6, these affordable booklets of black and white reproductions sold well and represent the only successful publishing endeavour by the WAAC.

⁶ See K. E. Bailes, Peter Fritzsche and Robert Wohl.

⁷ On the tradition of technological imperialism see Michael Adas and Daniel R. Headrick.

⁸ See David E. Omissi.

⁹ See Dennis Butts. Lambert and Butler, *Empire Air Routes*, 1936.

Works Cited

- Adas, Michael. *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance*. London: Cornell University Press, 1989.
- Aero-Engine*. Dir. Elton, Arthur. Empire Marketing Board Film Unit. 1934.
- Bailes, K. E. "Technology and Legitimacy: Soviet Aviation and Stalinism in the 1930s." *Technology and Culture* 17:1 (1976): 55-81.
- Barcelona Bombed*. 14.2.38. British Movietone News 32568. www.movietone.com. Accessed 3.1.08.
- Beer, G. "The Island and the Aeroplane: The Case of Virginia Woolf." *Nation and Narration*. Ed. H. K. Bhabha. London: Routledge, 1990. 265-90.
- Bombing Madrid*. 1937. Pathé 534.16. www.britishpathe.com. Accessed 3.1.08.
- Britain Can Take It!* Dir. Jennings, Humphrey and Harry Watt. GPO Film Unit, Ministry of Information. 1940.
- Burke, Edmund, and James Thompson Boulton. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful. Edited with an Introduction and Notes by J. T. Boulton*. Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, 1958.

- Butts, Dennis. "Imperialists of the Air-Flying Stories 1900-1950." *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature*. Ed. Jeffrey Richards. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989.
- Calder, Angus. *The Myth of the Blitz*. London: Pimlico, 1991.
- Charlton, L. E. O., G. T. Garratt, and R. Fletcher. *The Air Defence of Britain*. London: Penguin, 1938.
- Cole, Leslie. *Glider Construction – Fitting Undercarriages*. 1942. Government Art Collection, London.
http://www.gac.culture.gov.uk/search/Object.asp?object_key=10553
- Conquest of the Air*. Dir. Korda, Zoltan. London Films. 1940.
- Duffy, Louis. *Aftermath*. 1940. Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne.
- Edgerton, David. *England and the Aeroplane: An Essay on a Militant and Technological Nation*. London: Macmillan, 1991.
- Ensor, John. *Rhythms of Mass Production*. 1942. Imperial War Museum, London.
- Foss, Brian. "British Artists and the Second World War, with Particular Reference to the War Artists' Advisory Committee of the Ministry of Information." Diss. London University, 1991.
- . "Message and Medium: Government Patronage, National Identity and National Culture in Britain, 1939-45." *Oxford Art Journal* 14.2 (1991): 55-72.
- . *War Paint: Art, War, State and Identity in Britain 1939-1945*. Newhaven and London: Yale University Press, 2007.
- Fritzsche, Peter. *A Nation of Fliers German Aviation and the Popular Imagination*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- Harries, Meirion, and Susie Harries. *The War Artists*. London: Michael Joseph in association with The Imperial War Museum and the Tate Gallery, 1983.

Headrick, Daniel R. *The Tools of Empire : Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century*. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981.

Hyde, H. Montgomery. *British Air Policy between the Wars, 1918-1939*. London: Heinmann, 1976.

Industrial Britain. Dir. Flaherty, Robert. Empire Marketing Board Film Unit. 1931. IWM. GP55/155. "Cole to Dickey." 02.02.1942.

The Heart of Britain. Dir. Jennings, Humphrey. Crown Film Unit, Ministry of Information. 1941.

Light, Alison. *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars*. London: Routledge, 1991.

The Lion Has Wings. Dir. Powell, Michael, Adrian Brunel and Brian Desmond Hurst. London Films. 1939.

McLaine, Ian. *Ministry of Morale: Home Front Morale and the Ministry of Information in World War 2*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1979.

Moore, Henry. *Grey Tube Shelter*. 1940. The Tate, London.

<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=9671>

Moore, Henry, and Frances Carey. *A Shelter Sketchbook*. London: Published for the Trustees of the British Museum by British Museum Publications, 1988.

Murray, Charles. *Building a Bomber Aircraft*. 1941. Imperial War Museum, London.

Nash, Paul. *Battle of Britain*. 1941. Imperial War Museum, London.

Nye, David E. *American Technological Sublime*. Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 1994.

Omissi, David E. *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force 1919-1939*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990.

"Parliament." *The Times*. 31.07.1934. p.8.

Patterson, Ian. *Guernica and Total War*. London: Profile, 2007.

Picasso, Pablo. *Guernica*. 1937. Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid.

Production: War Pictures by British Artists. London: Oxford University Press, 1943.

Rieger, Bernhard. *Technology and the Culture of Modernity in Britain and Germany, 1890-1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Ross, Alan. *Colours of War: War Art 1939-45*. London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1983.

Sillars, Stuart. *British Romantic Art and the Second World War*. London: Macmillan, 1991.

"Tate Collection: Tube Shelter Perspective by Henry Moore". 10.08.2008.

<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=9674>.

Things to Come. Dir. Menzies, William Cameron and Alexander Korda. London Film Productions. 1936.

Topolski, Feliks. *The Warehouse Shelter in Commercial Road, East End*. 1940. Imperial War Museum, London.

"War on Babies: New Victims of Hun Hatred." *The Daily Mirror* 14.08.1917. p.1.

Wells, H. G. *The War in the Air, and Particularly How Mr. Bert Smallways Fared While It Lasted*. London: Bell, 1908.

Wohl, Robert. *The Spectacle of Flight: Aviation and the Western Imagination, 1920-1950*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.

Woolf, Virginia. *Between the Acts*. 1941. London: Penguin, 2000.